

Dad eulogy

Thomas William Firestine
1941-2024.

(Self-introduction, grandson of Tom)

Thomas was born on Nov 14, 1941 in Fresno, CA to William Jr. and Helen Firestine. He was the youngest of three children and the only son. Tom grew up in a modest area of Fresno within a small German immigrant community. He grew up close to his grandparents and had a strong loving relationship with them especially with his grannie.

Tom had a strong work ethic that showed at a very young age. He landed his first job with the Fresno Bee as a delivery boy. He worked his way up in the office to eventually hold a position in the circulation department and held this job through high school with a number of awards under his belt. He was always very proud to say that he won passes to Disneyland the year it had opened by selling the most Fresno Bee subscriptions. He enlisted in the Air Force at the age of 18 and was stationed in Nebraska and later in Guam where he held the position of First Airman Police on Guam island during the Cuban Missile Crisis and what was a Pre Vietnam police action at the time. He often spoke of being on a SAC base that was a target for incoming nuclear missiles. He said that he was ordered that if there were a launch, to just pull out a chair and wait for impact. Tom spoke of having to hold down the airport under enemy fire as he heard gunfire whizzing past him. He would chuckle and tell the story of being the only one to miss Bob Hope live on Guam because he had to pull police duty that night. He told his family many times of his harrowing experience with the typhoon coming through the island and him losing his footing, sliding across the concrete floor in the wind and rain uncontrollably on his way out of the second-story of the barracks during the storm. He spoke of being caught by the arm by a buddy keeping him from flying right out of the building.

After leaving the service, Tom met the love of his life, Carol Ardel Ransom. They were married just 7 months after their first date. Their marriage would last the better part of 59 years.

After his service, Tom got a job at Bell Phone Company, which later became Pacific Bell. He would go on to work there until his retirement. Later in his career, he spoke of being proud of his part in implementing DSL technologies in the late 80s and early 90s, which was very important in the telecom world at that time.

Tom and Carol made their home on Ashlan Ave in Fresno. It was there that they began their family. They would go on to have 4 children. Later on, they would take on another that they would lovingly consider, without doubt, one of their own.

In 1977 Tom and Carol made the decision to move to Hilmar, CA after Tom accepted a transfer to the Pacific Bell switchroom building in Turlock. He would later say that the move to Hilmar was the best thing he could have ever done for his family. Tom never shied away from saying that, when faced with a big decision, especially a move, he always knew and trusted when the Lord was guiding him. He could recognize God's hand in blessing a decision. He would tell his children later that the move to Hilmar was led by the Lord. Tom made many lasting friendships there at the switchroom in Turlock. More than a few of his fellow switchmen became long time friends. Tom spoke of enjoying morning donuts across the street at the Fail's Donut Shop with his buddies for many years even after his retirement. He spoke proudly about these friendships.

After the move to Hilmar Tom and Carol became parishioners at Holy Rosary Catholic Church. There they attended Mass every Sunday and on Holy days. Tom and Carol raised their children in Hilmar enjoying all of the wonderful things of small town life. Tom could be counted on and seen by his kids at various football games, band performances, and even enjoying the homecoming parade on the corner of Lander and Falke every year. Tom loved and always spoke highly of this small town. He would always say that Hilmar was his home. In his retirement years, he enjoyed being part of the Honor Guard serving many funerals at San Joaquin Memorial cemetery in Santa Nella. Tom had made some lasting friendships serving there as well. Tom told everyone of how much he loved being part of that group.

Years after Tom retired, they moved to Atwater. There, they enjoyed their life in retirement. He spoke of enjoying being so close to the old Air Force base and living in what used to be the housing there. Tom and Carol would often go out to the old field area to let their dogs, first Shelby and later Cece, run and explore. In their retirement years, Tom would often take Carol on little morning trips to the local McDonald's in what would become coined as their "therapy." This was their chance to talk things over and enjoy each other's company every morning. This "therapy" lasted for years and was one of their cherished and special traditions together. In 2023, Tom and Carol moved to Reedley, CA. There they settled in with their daughter Nancy. They were very excited about this move and looked at it as another chapter in their lives.

Tom has always been a strong man of faith and loved and served God by serving his family, friends and those around him. There is no doubt in the minds of those who knew him that Tom cared for and provided for so many with everything he had. His home was always full, not just with his own family, but with extended family, friends and neighbors. He always opened his home and his pocketbook to help others in their need. He provided so many with a place to visit, warm and loving communication, often spiritual direction, food, clothing, and other necessities of life. Tom and Carol were long-time parishioners of Holy Rosary and later Saint

Anthony's in Atwater and St. Patrick's in Merced. Tom loved and served his wife and children with a true and constant devotion and fatherly love. He "fostered" more than a few extended family. He helped those in difficult situations to find rest, peace, and a sense of belonging in his home. He was a Fatherly support and role model to everyone who knew him. Many sought his opinion and advice. He was a true brother to so many. He wore many titles including Tommy, honey, dad, Uncle Tom, Tom 1, Godpapa, and for the last 35 years has affectionately been Papa to most!

As most of us know, Tom had many passions and interests that were so classic of him.

For example, he was an avid Ham Radio operator, starting since he was a teenager. He loved using Morse code and contacting other ham radio operators all over the world. It was a cherished hobby of his. He often would participate in contests to see how far he could contact, often reaching people as far as Australia and New Zealand. He had developed many friendships through his ham radio hobby, whom he would often visit and keep in touch with through their shared love of it. A few of these friends became life-long and quite dear to him.

More than just the ham radio, Tom was deeply interested in electronics. He even built a few robots throughout his lifetime. His most popular, whom he affectionately referred to as "QuadPod," had captured everyone's interest, including many family, friends and neighbor kids.

Tom also had a great love for the outdoors. Santa Cruz was always a favorite of his and Carol's. He especially loved camping and backpacking with his family and friends at Fresno Dome in the Sierras. He camped for the better part of 40+ years and he would invite any and all who wanted to enjoy this special yearly vacation time with his family. He even successfully attempted one year to camp for 21 days straight in a row and backpack into the deep Sierras with a host of characters, from Carol to his kids, to uncles, in-laws, nieces, nephews and cousins, all of whom tagged along with enjoyment. He supported many with good times, wonderful lasting memories and cherished moments.

In his retirement years, he enjoyed gardening and often had large crops of tomatoes, zucchini, and a variety of fruits and veggies, all of which many visitors enjoyed as he shared everything that he had.

Tom also had a very huge love and interest in space and aviation, another interest that made him him. You could always count on visiting him and sitting in his backyard, looking at the stars and listening to him as he pointed out to you the planets, satellites, and even the occasional shooting stars.

Tom has always exhibited the characteristics of a truly good man. Words like humility, kindness, provider, listener, peacemaker, hard-worker, devoted and faithful are all descriptions befitting him.

In his final days, he was surrounded by many of his loved ones. We can all be thankful to God for the gift of Tom and his influence in our lives. He touched so many during his life. May we all cherish our memories of him as we await to see him again, something he always professed knowing and believing in.

Tom is preceded in death by his parents William and Helen, his sisters, Helen Rugguri and Judy Krabo, and his son-in-law, Steven Marsh. He is survived by his wife of 59 years, Carol, daughter Sandra (Peter) Smith, daughter Nancy Marsh, son Joseph (Karen) Firestine, daughter Pamela (Brad) Beaune, foster son, Gilbert (Jenniffer) Medeiros; 14 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren; numerous nieces, nephews, godchildren, in-laws and family.

For now, we can affectionately say that WA6ALA has signed off.

Rest in peace Papa.